METHODS OF EXPRESSIVE FORMAL DESIGN IN DEBUSSY'S SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

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METHODS OF EXPRESSIVE FORMAL DESIGN IN DEBUSSY'S SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO

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ABSTRACT

This paper will discuss Claude Debussy's final work, the Sonata for Violin and Piano, in terms of classical sonata form. This analytical view is not chosen to suggest that the classical design was used as a model for this work, but to draw out associations between the forms that help us to better understand Debussy's unique design and appreciate its novel construction. Such an investigation is valuable as a compositional study, exemplifying the freedom with which tonal relations and thematic repetition can be organized while still outlining a form which satisfies the desired balance between recurrence and variety. From historical and biographical perspectives, it gives us insight into Debussy's stylistic development and how traditional forms, either strategically or unintentionally, are reflected or alluded to in the music of his final years.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

The French composer Claude Debussy is one the iconic composers of the early twentieth century. This is due in large part to his unique musical sound. Debussy innovated a style that blends a deep palette of modal and chromatic colors without forcing them into rigid structural shapes. Often the rhetorical aspects of traditional musical design are suggested but blurred by his personal aesthetic language. This paper will discuss how he successfully organizes his ideas without falling directly into traditional expectations. General principals of organization such as repetition, contrast, arrival, and completion are consistently implemented, but do not conform to more prescriptive tonal principals. This tension against classical design will be explored in the Sonata for Violin and Piano. To explore the negotiation of his personal aesthetic and traditional norms, a discussion of cultural and personal context should be addressed first.

In the years following the Franco-Prussian War, political tensions were high. Despite, or perhaps due to their losses a desire for French nationalism began to accumulate. The French National Society of Music was established soon after the close of the war in 1871 in order to further manifest national pride through music. Its methods included the promotion of composers who fit their concept modern French art and their views often denigrated the German tradition. In the search for a 'purely French' form of music, Claude Debussy was added to their membership.[1]

In his own writings, Debussy often exalted artists, particularly poets, for an aesthetic that was considered unique to their homeland. This validation of the French style was further expressed in his support for the eighteenth-century composer Rameau

[1] Teresa Davidian, "Debussy's Sonata Forms," PhD diss., (University of Chicago, 1988).

whom Debussy actively studied. Rameau, to Debussy, was the ideal historical model of French music for composers of his nationality to study.[2] This contrasted with the Germanic tradition supported by the conservatories of the time.

In the pursuit of writing music independent from said tradition and escape the "excesses of romanticism", Debussy took on the traits of the French art and literature of the time. This is apparent in both his own writings and through his work. Of his approximately sixty published songs, most use text from recent contemporary French poets. Symbolist poets were especially of interest to him. Soon his music took on a certain distance from clarity that is akin to such literature. Traits of picturesque stillness and a perceived loss of temporality are often observed. Debussy describes a certain willingness "…in some places to paint in monochrome…"[3] in order to imbue his music with these desired aesthetic qualities.

His influences, however, are not isolated to the French arts. The composer himself admits in his writings to a 'Wagnerian phase' of sorts.[4] Some scholars have investigated a so-called 'neoclassical' trend in his music that alludes to older forms. Many titles of his works and their movements reference Baroque dance suites and reference their form.[5] Debussy also spoke openly of his respect for the great composers Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven, who championed the classical style of the past.[6]

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[2] Eric Lenz, "Neoclassicism in Claude Debussy's Sonate Pour Violencelle et Piano," PhD diss., (University of Alabama, 2002).

[3] Teresa Davidian, "Debussy and Symbolism: A Comparative Study of the Aesthetics of Claude Debussy and Three French Symbolist Poets With An Analysis of Debussy's Symbolist Techniques In Pelleas et Melisande," PhD diss., (Stanford University, 1992).

[4] Ibid., 27.

[5] Lenz, "Neoclassicism in Claude Debussy".

[6] Avo Somer, "Musical Syntax in the Sonatas of Debussy: Phrase Structure and Formal Function" *Music Theory Spectrum*, 27, no.1(2005), 1-3.

Among these older forms is the sonata, of which Debussy intended to make a set of six before halted by his death. Each of these pieces were meant to include different instrumentation, the last including all the instruments used in the previous five.[7] The Sonata for Violin and Piano is the third and last completed member of this endeavor. As his final work, it displays both his mastery of old forms and his long-developed aesthetic artistry. This paper will discuss its form and investigate the means by which its architecture remains coherent despite the ambiguous proclivity that permeates it. To do so, there will be investigation on how classical structures are suggested and subverted in the Sonata for Violin and Piano.

Figure 1 outlines the overall form and harmony of the first movement of the Sonata for Violin and Piano. It is important to note that classical sonata terminology has been used to categorize each section for convenience of comprehension and comparison, but as this paper will further illustrate, their function and design are often contrary to classical definitions.

[7] Edward Lockspeiser, *Debussy: His Life and Mind*, (London: Cassell, 1967), 176.

FIGURE 1

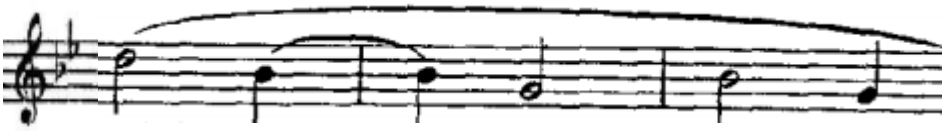
Section	Measures	Tonal Area	Material
A (Theme I)	mm. 1-24	G min	a, b
Transition	mm. 25-41	<unstable> G pedal	a, c
B (Theme II)	mm. 42-63	Pentatonic (Gmin)	c, b
C (Closing)	mm. 63-83	G min	a', b
D (Development)	mm. 84-127	E major C major (mm. 106-127)	d1
(Re)Transition	mm. 128-149	Eb minor	d2
A' (Recap)	mm. 150-180	G	a,d1,b
Transition 2	mm. 181-195	<unstable>	----
A"	mm. 196-225	----	a,d2
B'	mm. 226-237	Pentatonic (Gmin)	B
Coda Gesture	mm. 238-255	(C→) G	d2

EXPOSITION

PRIMARY THEMATIC ZONE

The first measures of Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano introduce a texture familiar to his style. Modal chords, closed in voicing and doubled in octaves, move slowly in parallel across the entirety of the first section. The temporal and composite vertical breadth of these sonorities frame a vast, open atmosphere for the violin's melodic lines to decorate. Figure 2 displays the motive presented by the violin as it first enters, hereafter referred to as motive 'a.' At first implying G Dorian with the raised E-natural of the piano's C major chord, the modality is quickly betrayed as the violin's enters and smoothly falls to an E-flat. Both instruments pause at the beginning of m. 8, as if to acknowledge the disruption. A G-flat is introduced to create a minor sonority around the E-flat and is quickly reinterpreted as the major third of a dominant chord in the following measures.

FIGURE 2

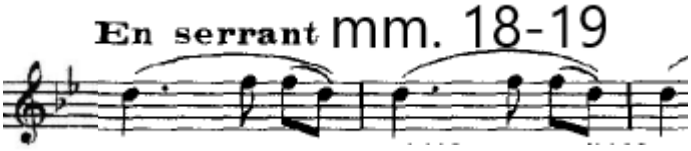


This modal interplay characterizes the first section, held together by a tonal centricity on G that is maintained but never directly articulated. Instead Debussy punctuates the first twenty-five measures with a half-cadence on the plagal fourth scale

degree in m. 14 and a "divergent" whole tone dominant chord in m. 25.[8] This leaves the first thematic area without any cadential confirmation of tonality.

In the process of establishing texture and a freely modal harmonic space, two important thematic ideas are introduced before there is a change of character or a move away from the general tonal centricity of G. First is the series of falling thirds shown in previously mentioned motive 'a.' Second is the symmetrical motion up and down a minor third which first appears in m. 18, depicted in Figure 3. Both will be reused and restated in quite recognizable forms throughout the movement, easily identified by their shape and rhythm. As further study will reveal, these motives are also fairly consistent in their functions within the larger structure. Motive 'a,' complementary to its position as opening material, is used to recall the opening and its tranquil mood. In contrast, motive 'b' (Figure 3) is uniformly implemented at the tail end of forms, often as material for the consequent or continuation portion of phrases. Such is its function at its first appearance, filling the answering phrase after the plagal half cadence in m. 13. This motive is repeated several times, expanded in interval at m. 22 and further altered to lead us to a destabilizing whole-tone harmony in m. 25.

FIGURE 3

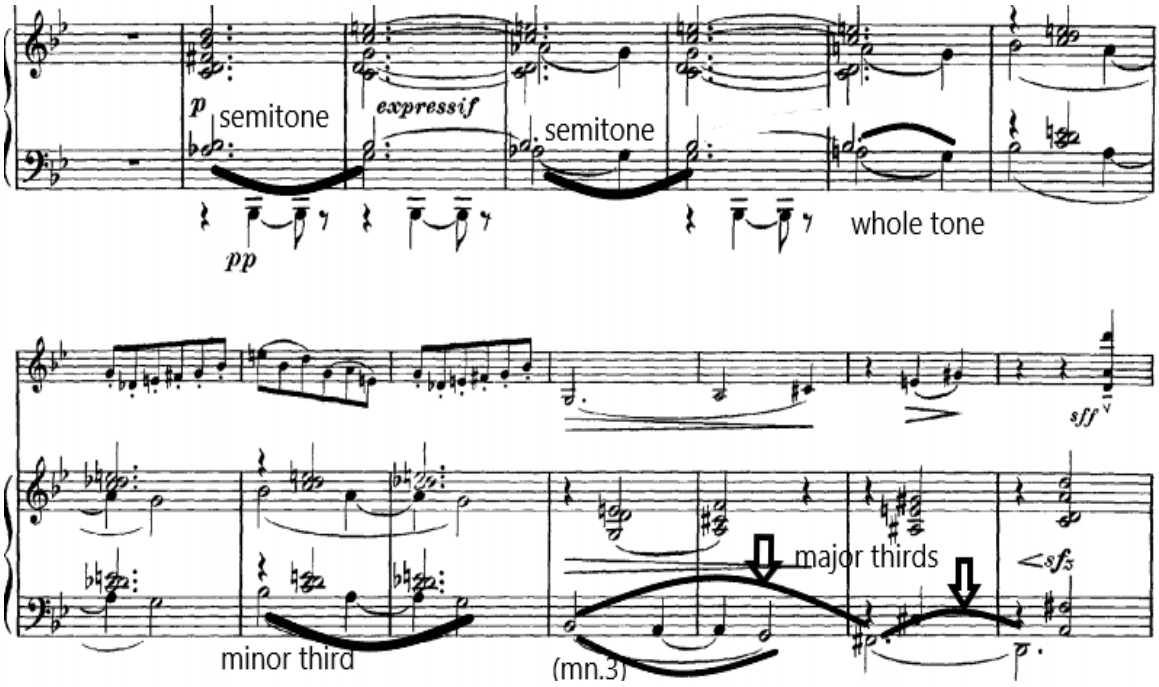


Following this is an unstable transition section. Described in Figure 4, it is here that we see a process shaping the foundational structure of a passage. As Teresa Davidian

[8] Avo Somer, "Musical Syntax", 17-19.

describes, short-term organizational systems such as this are not foreign to the composer's style and in fact form a characteristic link between the transitional sections referenced here and in another one of his late sonatas.[9] This consistency in placement implies a functional role for systematic material of this nature and in the process enforces a reading that would place thematic regions on either ends of this section.

FIGURE 4

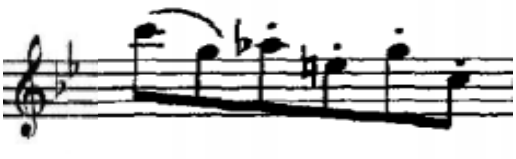


Beginning in m. 29, a bass motion at the top of the bass clef travels a minor

[9] Teresa Davidian, "Intervallic Process and Autonomy in the First Movement of Debussy's Sonata for Cello and Piano," *Music Theory Spectrum*, 14/15 ,1-12 (1989), https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.uh.edu/stable/41054221?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents (accessed Aug 5,2019).

second downwards from A-flat to G and repeats from m. 31 to m. 32. The interval then expands to a major second in m. 33 by raising the A-flat to an A-natural and then again to a B-flat in m. 34, using what was previously a pedaled note in m. 29-33 as part of the line. Now the interval has expanded to a minor third that is repeated three times from m. 34 to m. 39 in a rhythm that alludes to the violin's opening statement we labeled as motive 'a.' The shape broadens a final time to an overlapping pair of major thirds comprising the B-flat to F-sharp in mm. 38-40 and the motion from F-sharp to D in mm. 40-41.[10] As a whole, the harmonic foundation in the bass creates a pattern of gradual interval expansion, organizing the harmony that lies above it in a uniquely systematic fashion. Quite crucially, against these motions are lines fairly static in pitch content, allowing this lower voice motion (eventually doubled an octave above) to control the direction of motion essential to the transition's effect.

FIGURE 5



Despite the pedal and apparent direction toward G in the above measures, Debussy manages to create an ambiguous yet systematic harmonic direction. This is a direct result of the density of rhythm and harmony, organized by this underlying process to satisfy the need for tension without being far removed from the tonal world introduced in the opening of the piece.

[10] Teresa Davidian, "Debussy's Sonata Forms," PhD diss., (University of Chicago, 1988).

The active violin figures across these measures, motive 'c' (depicted in Figure 5), are the generator of the rhythmic density that contributes to the interpretation of this section as a transition. Constantly active figures, which contrasts starkly against the calmer, rhythmically varied patterns which precede it suggest an increase in energy characteristic of the transition.[11] Following this is a stark drop in motion as both instruments move towards punctuating a D major harmony, acting as the dominant before cadencing clearly on G in m.42. Though acting as a pickup into the next section rather than an isolated articulation, this gesture is quite similar in function and presentation to a medial caesura, punctuating the zone between themes by means of a conspicuous perfect authentic cadence.

SECONDARY THEMATIC ZONE

In considering this reading of structure, we are faced with the concern of key relations between themes. Typical of sonata forms, even in the more liberal interpretations of the late nineteenth-century, a difference of key is expected between the primary and secondary theme. It is here, as we will see in many other places, that Debussy's dismissal of tradition is clear. To understand how these moments, without contrast of tonal center, manage to flow together while successfully maintaining their independence, we must first examine the function of tonal contrast.

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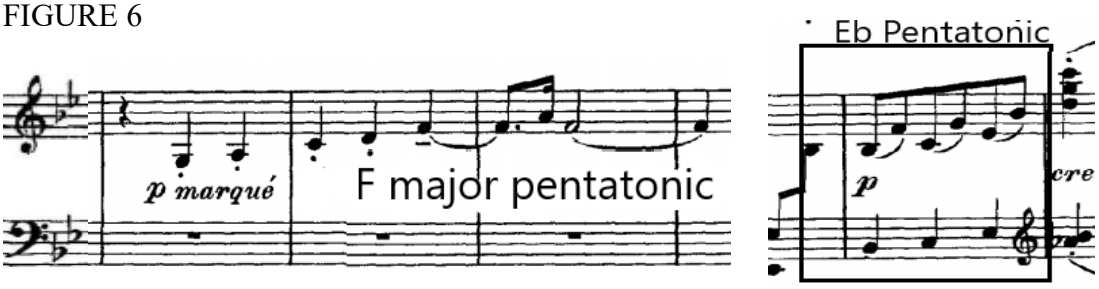
[11] James Hepokoski and Warren Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 93-98.

Even in so-called monothematic forms of the early and pre-classical eras the alternation of keys provided variation and, in the process, delineated formal structure within the music. Historically, this contrast was most commonly established between the tonic and dominant or occasionally between tonic and parallel mediant keys of the primary tonality. There are numerous reasons for this tonal scheme to be prevalent. One advantage of the system is the strong harmonic pull from the dominant to tonic that accentuates the satisfaction of returning to the original material in its home key. Both the parallel and dominant keys also retain a large majority of the pitches from the original scale. This is an advantage in terms of homogeneity. By minimizing the discrepancy in pitch content, composers could successfully move away from the primary tonality without a loss of continuity or harsh contrast.

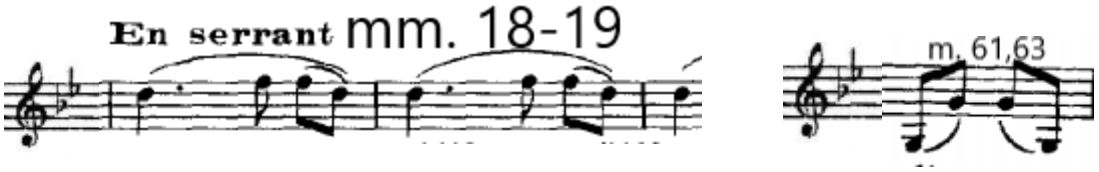
Debussy accomplishes both the goals of variety and homogeneity in this section beginning at m. 42 in a unique but analogous manner. Aside from an exchanged incomplete neighbor tone at m. 49, the entirety of the violin part from mm. 42-49 is composed of the notes: G, B-flat, C, D, and F – a G minor pentatonic scale. The pentatonic sonority is enforced by similar pentatonic collections isolated in the piano, shown in Figure 6. By these means, Debussy has not strayed far away from our original tonality of G minor, yet successfully creates a sonority that any listener could recognize as independent from the sonata's opening theme.

FIGURE 6



A common phase structure is apparent in the measures spanning this highly pentatonic section beginning at m. 42 and the marking “L’istesso tempo tres expressif” at m. 64. Two six-measure statements of the violin’s falling motive, a pentatonic version of motive ‘c’ from the transition, are separated by the octave leap in m. 48. Together they form the presentation portion of a sentence structure. To form the continuation of the sentence, Debussy reintroduces motive ‘b’ in a repetitive fragmented form. Transposed a perfect octave above its original form, pitch is maintained and lightly embellished by an F-sharp at m. 57. The rhythm of motive ‘b’ is then referenced, now with an exaggerated interval shape, in m. 61 and 63 (see Figure 7). The fragmentation and repetition of the figure make a clear continuation for the phrase and works to articulate the end of the section. In the absence of a formal cadence, this is used as an intuitive substitution for the role of punctuation.

FIGURE 7



Intriguing in Debussy’s design for this sonata is the reappearance of this motive outside of its original thematic area. Due to the shared tonal center of G between the two sections, motive ‘b’ can be stated at its original pitch level without transposition. Not only is it identical in pitch content, it is also used for a similar purpose. In both of its statements thus far motive ‘b’ has served the purpose of concluding phrases. This is both

a captivating means of forming continuity and a rejection of the old ways of dividing material. Thematic material is typically associated with a particular area of the overall form in order to provide clarity between each section. Perhaps this is a clear illustration of Debussy's artistic desire to do just the opposite of clarifying boundaries.

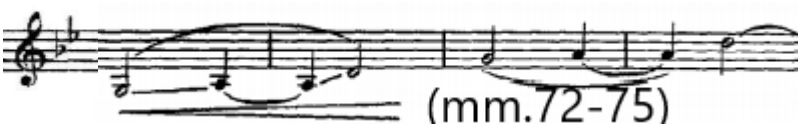
As this paper will describe, the motive continues to be presented in a wide variety of contexts but remains clearly recognizable. Thematic zones are blurred by this incongruity of material in the process. A similar decision is made in the use of motive 'c' from the transition section. Its transformation and reappearance as the defining material of the pentatonic thematic area creates direct linear continuity in the form while undercutting the movement from one structural region to the next. Debussy effectively evokes the French aesthetic with his use of understatement while still appealing to the classical aims of organized structural design.

CLOSING ZONE

In the pursuit of a seamless movement between material, the section beginning in m. 64 maintains the low G pedal from the music prior. The texture is reminiscent of the opening of the piece, with long, closely voiced chords from the piano. Complimenting this with similarly languid motions is a violin part which echoes, or more accurately, mirrors its own opening material. Rather than arpeggiating downward in half-notes as in motive 'a,' the violin line leaps upward in dotted half-notes as a clear allusion to the first eight measures. The similarity becomes more obvious as the line cascades down and rises

once again in mm. 72-76 (see Figure 8). Rhythmically, the gesture is now identical to motive ‘a.’ Against the harmonic background enforced by the pedaled G that anchors these measures, the connection between these sections is unmistakable.

FIGURE 8



Debussy has subtly transformed the primary material into something new. While the textures are closely related, simple modifications of direction and rhythm give the melodic line a fresh identity. Further alterations are included through small adjustments in the piano. Though harmony points clearly to G both in this section and at the beginning, the harmony following m. 64 features a collage of dominant harmonies. Starting with the inverted B-flat seventh chord which anticipates m. 64, the shaped is moved in parallel motion to a B-natural dominant seventh that slides wistfully into a half-diminished chord of the same root in m. 72. By m. 77 a C dominant seventh is introduced before the pedaled G has moved from the bass. When placed over the pedal tone these harmonies seem to hover around a common focal point, but do not lose their unstable qualities. In effect, the primary thematic material is recalled as a foggy memory of its initial statement.

This recall of primary material parallels Darcy and Hepokoski’s description of a closing zone in traditional sonata form. Typically, this section of the exposition is post-cadential and serves to confirm the secondary key. Debussy has managed to construct an instance of analogous formal design while rejecting both of these assumed functions. The

dominant harmonies do little to confirm any given key.[12] What is provided instead comes in the form of a pedaled bass that clearly enforces the primary key from the beginning of the movement. Our introduction to this section in m. 64 does not come from any cadential *arrival* but is rather *arrived at* by an unarticulated juxtaposition of two phrases with a shared pedal point. This illustrates a compositional desire for smooth and understated movement between formal areas, as opposed to using these formal units to accomplish structural or harmonic objectives.

In order to leave this closing section as subtly as entered, Debussy implements motive 'b' yet again. Beginning in m. 76, while still comfortably above the pedaled G that characterizes this section, the f-d motion is seen above the staff and transposed yet another octave higher in m. 80. This is the highest statement of motive 'b' in the movement so far. Without any overt cadence or aggressive gesture, Debussy provides a sense of completion and progression in its elevated presentation here. In each appearance of the motive, it has reached an octave higher than the last: first within the staff at m. 18, an octave higher at m. 56 and now a fulfilling two octaves above in mm. 80-81. The D-natural is sustained as new material, from what we will refer as the development, gently enters.

DEVELOPMENT

Marked by a sudden change of key and an ostinato comprising the most active rhythm in the piano thus far, the development region introduces a fresh texture.

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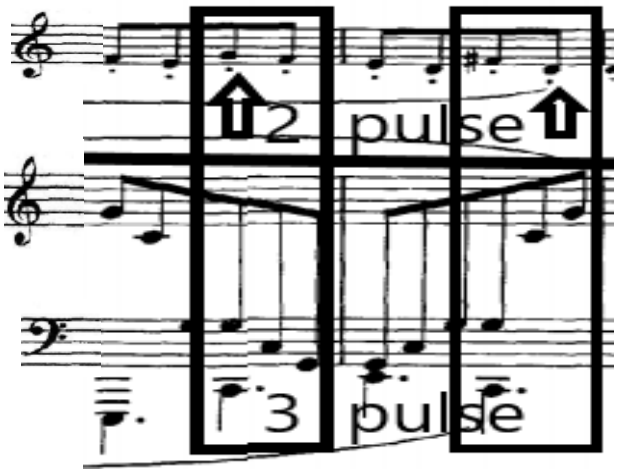
[12] Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 180-183.

Considering the trend toward subtlety and non-directional form that we have seen, this is a suggestive compositional decision. Development sections often feature previous material, heavily fragmented, augmented, or otherwise transformed. This is typical of music of the nineteenth century, to which programmatic interpretations are both common and natural. By avoiding the reuse and alteration of existing themes, Debussy betrays any narrative reading that would be implied by the conflict and mutation of material in a development section. Instead, we are greeted by a mere change of venue.

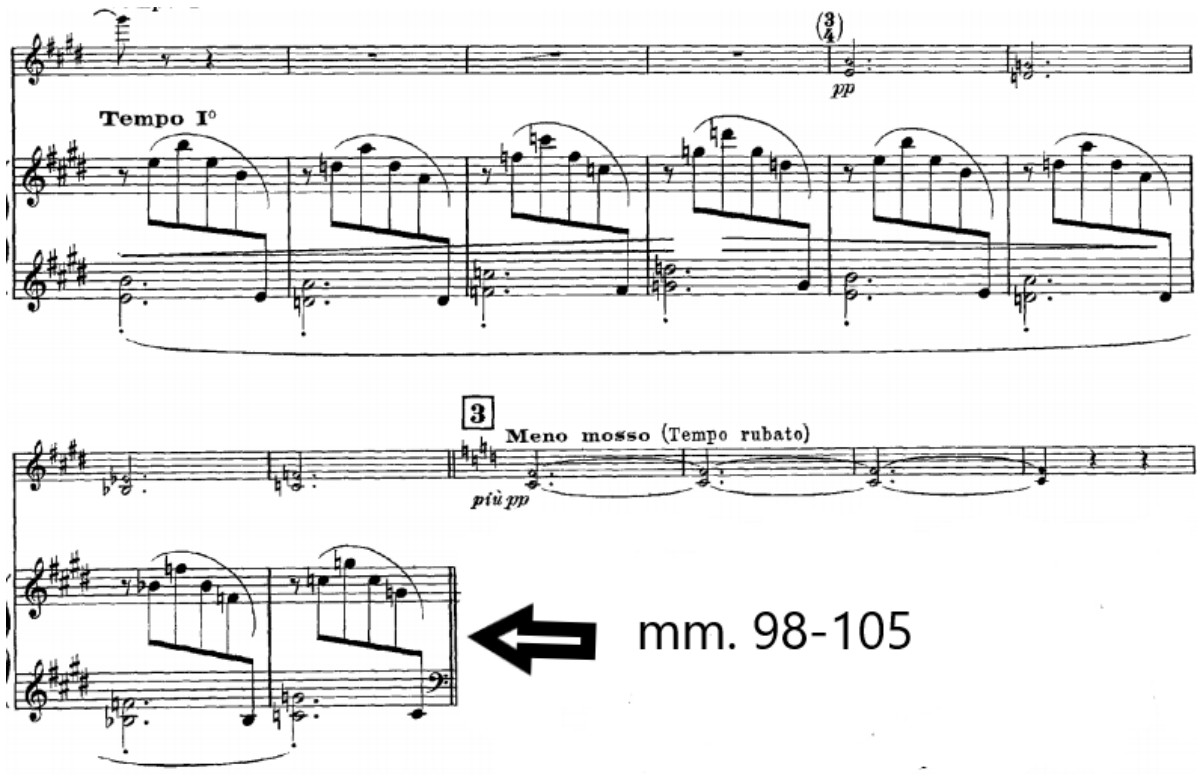
The texture established in m. 84 provides more surface rhythm for the piano without contradicting the peaceful mood present in the exposition. An ostinato provides a sense of stability for the violin to lightly float above. The key of E major, outlined by the bass line, implies a distance from the otherwise consistent G minor tonality. A polyrhythm (see Figure 9), created by the implied two-pulse pattern in the violin and triplets of the piano's right hand, add to the ethereal, indefinite quality of the texture. Debussy has brought us to a new landscape. This departure is made all the more satisfying through the juxtaposition implied by the large-scale form. Not only has he established a key that is far removed from the G minor that the movement began with, but we move into this area directly following the unclear closing zone. The tonal instability of the closing section with all of its unstable dominant harmonies becomes a beautiful contrast when placed against the harmonic clarity of the development's ostinato.

FIGURE 9



Continuing the trend of tonal change, Debussy soon moves to C major in m. 106 through an eight-measure gesture beginning in m. 98, depicted in Figure 10. The ostinato is adjusted to suit the new key, but the texture is identical. Most interesting in view of the piano's transposition is the similarity of violin part across the two phrases. The note collection from mm. 88-97 in violin part suggest a Mixolydian mode in combination with the E major ostinato of the piano. This modal shading is a result of the presence of the D natural, emphasized by repetition, grace note elaboration and duration at the lowest register of the violin's line. When the gesture is reproduced in m. 110, now against the piano's C major harmony, there is little alteration in the instrument's melodic line. The C-sharp from the previous phrase becomes a C-natural while all other pitches and rhythms remain identical. As a result, the preserved F-sharp, accentuated by frequent repetition and its position at the onset of the phrase, gives mm. 110-118 a Lydian modal flavor.

FIGURE 10



This modal mixture is consistent with the methods of variation that have been presented in the exposition. While the latter avoids any articulated movement to a tonal center other than G, the development section understates the otherwise dramatic shift in harmony by preserving the melodic line that lies above it. Debussy essentially re-harmonizes a familiar object in a manner consistent with the modal mixture that has become quintessential to the sonata's character. An expressive contrast is apparent when this method of variation is compared to the usage of motive 'c' between the transition and second thematic zone. In the case of motive 'c,' the violin's melodic shape is molded into the form of a pentatonic gesture to express the harmony of the new section. In contrast, the violin's line in the development section is presented in a nearly identical form while

the piano's ostinato is moved to generate a new sonority. Variety, then, is achieved by means of harmonic displacement rather than the relocation of pitches.

When investigated in consideration of the common techniques and practices of the classical sonata's development zone, the process we observe here in Debussy's analogous structure illustrates an insightful alternative that suits his aesthetic goals. It is typical for the traditional form to feature a density of harmonic change by modulation, sequential fragmentation, and other means of tonal thrust. This is well suited for the desired effect of tension in a development section that seeks to transform the material by means of dramatic struggle. Resolution is then anticipated in the recapitulation, which reconciles the given material by means of restatement at or near the original pitch level.[13]

Debussy clearly does not intend to impose such a narrative direction upon his themes. Movement away from the tonic key is achieved in his form but with material from outside of the expositional section. A form of freedom from interpretation is provided by the absence of repetition in this method. By avoiding or obscuring large scale patterns between the primary structural units, the form prevents us from forming associations with any chronological narrative implications.

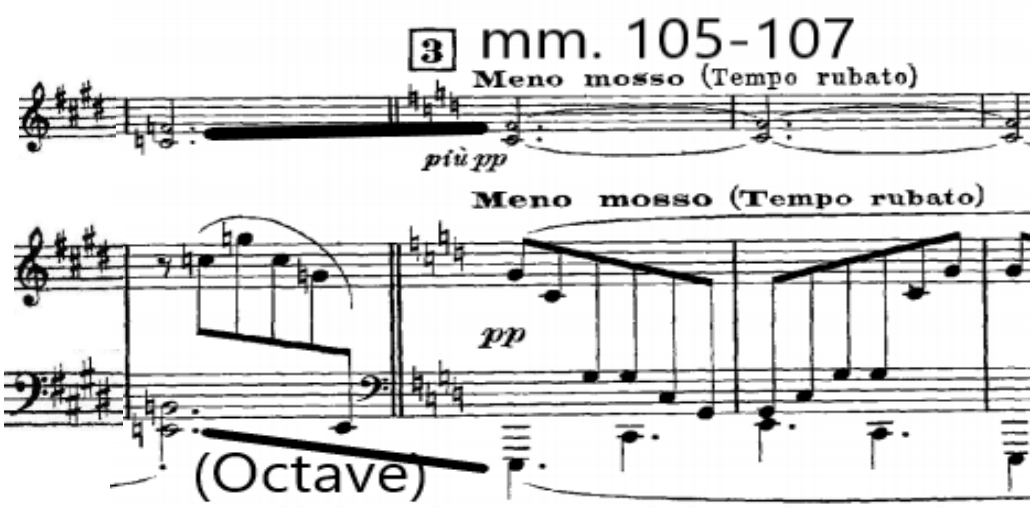
The typical drama expected of a development section is also absent here. This is both despite and because of Debussy's means of modulation in the associated measures. Modulation's typical effect would at first seem counter-intuitive to an aesthetic of more delicate contrasts. The disparity is solved, however, when movements between two keys is not accompanied by any affirmational cadential gesture and is instead met with a consistency of texture and melody. Here, the duplication of the violin line serves both the

[13] Hepokoski and Darcy, *Elements of Sonata Theory*, 231-254.

purpose of modal shading we have already discussed and the subtle role of binding the identities of the two presentations closer together.

Even the eight-bar gesture beginning in m. 98 which separates these phrases does little to divulge their bisection. There is a consistency of texture in the use of slower notes in the left hand of the piano while elaborating with arching arpeggiations in the right. A drifting bass motion takes us from E to C, using pitches like D-natural and B-flat which are more closely associated with a C tonality than the previous key of E. The violin's double-stops move in parallel with the left hand, and avoid any unnecessary enunciation of the arrival in C major by repeating the chord in m. 105 in the following measure. This helps to soften our movement into the new key as the piano begins its statement of the transposed ostinato, shown in Figure 11. To further cushion the impact the impact of the harmonic leap, the bass moves in small intervals rather than any dominant motion with strong harmonic pull. A B-flat, the minor modal seventh of the new key, is used to approach the target note of C before falling the harmonically unassuming interval of an octave.

FIGURE 11



The structure spanning the first half of the development implies a periodic phrase. The first phrase can be seen in mm.88-127 and takes the form of a complex, modulatory period-like structure. By Caplin's definition, periods are composed of two such pairs of basic and contrasting idea referred to as antecedent and consequent. In parallel periods the basic idea is presented similarly between the antecedent and consequent segments. The contrasting ideas exhibit differences as a result of their distinct functions. Antecedent phrases end with tonal openness, creating a need for resolution that is eventually provided by the consequent's contrasting idea. The consequent will therefore alter material from the antecedent to create a cadential figure that closes the phrase.[14]

Mm. 88-127 can be separated into two units that act analogously, separated by a key change in m. 106. Each statement contains a melody from the violin that is followed by long notes in parallel motion with the piano's left hand. In this case, the violin melody functions as the 'basic idea' unit of a parallel period, while the spiraling long notes take on the role of contrasting idea. When the basic idea is restated in mm. 110-119, Debussy creatively reinterprets the violin's melody that is repeated in a nearly identical form. This is accompanied by a modulation from E major to C major in the piano that provides harmonic motion and contrast without pushing the melody far from its original vertical placement. Presenting material in this fashion develops the listener's familiarity with a given theme, much like the repetition of a basic idea in a typical parallel period. This

[14] William Caplin, *Classical Form : A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 49-58.

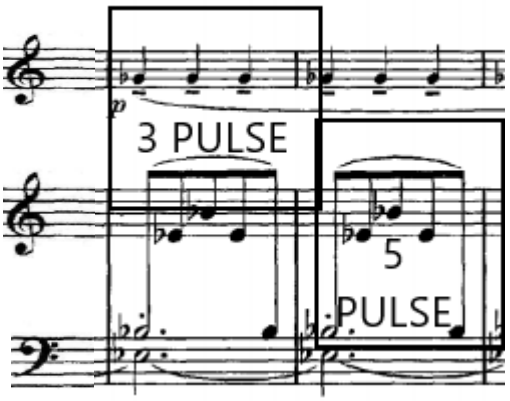
repetition gains interest due to tonal and modal ambiguity. Debussy creates these harmonic effects by means of modal-mixture consistent with the variation methods of the exposition. The movement of a third from E to C at m. 106 avoids the harmonic tension implied by a dominant harmony or half cadence. This modulation, along with the reharmonization of the basic idea in the consequent of the phrase, separate this structure from a classical periodic phrase without losing its shape. Instead, it is clarity that is lost in the process. The comparison of Debussy's music to impressionistic painting would seem appropriate here. His organization of this implied period suggests a shape without clearly delineating it.

Debussy's use of these complex structures allows the listener's attention to drift with the music, lacking a clear harmonic destination. The development effectively becomes a collage of ideas which the composer has freely painted. Modal variations act as various shades of color that are layered on top of the melody as it is repeated. To allow the listener to digest this wide array of color, the phrase covers an expansive range of thirty-nine measure. The oddly-sized measure count discourages the division of this phrase into evenly sized ideas. Instead, it becomes an individual object.

Following this phrase, another statement eight-bar gesture based on motive 'd1' reappears in m. 120, this time to carry the key from C major to E-flat minor. There is no held chord from the violin to meld this gesture to following measures as it was in mm. 105-106. A clear plagal motion in the bass from A-flat to E-flat provides a clear but understated cadential gesture. Here, the division is definite and consistent with the organization of Debussy's ideas. Accompanying this more apparent shift in harmony is the introduction of a new idea in the violin. In mm. 133-135 the piano's quintuplet

gesture persists against a clear three beat gesture from the violin (see Figure 12). This use of polyrhythm draws similarities to the development's original texture, though a dialogue between three and five-beat patterns is emphasized in place of the two-against-three polyrhythm identified in m. 88.

FIGURE 12



An important characteristic of this new gesture in the violin, labeled motive 'd2' in Figure 1, are the pitch bends seen in Figure 13. This slide up and down a major second is another example of emphasized modal inflection. The violin passes from the minor third through the major third and perfect fourth before sliding down to the original pitch. This interplay between three chromatically neighboring notes is made possible by the shell-like harmonic voicing of the piano's gesture in these measures. The open fifth interval between E-flat and B-flat welcomes the violin to suggest major, minor and quartal sonorities without conflicting undesirably with the piano's ostinato. As the violin's gesture returns to its original pitch in m. 137, the bass moves from a B-flat to a C, creating a diminished harmony. This tension is soon resolved by a repetition of the violin's gesture. Placed against a different open fifth of D and A in m. 140, the same

chromatic pitches are respelled and reinterpreted. The enharmonic F-sharp, G-natural and G-sharp now implicate major, quartal, and Lydian modal sonorities respectively.

FIGURE 13

This direct re-contextualizing of the violin's line establishes a continuity that spans the entirety of the development section. Twice in the span of this developmental zone Debussy has repeated a melodic line from the violin to be reinterpreted by a new harmony in the piano. In both cases the violin's gesture is kept essentially identical. This emphasizes modal sonorities and provides variety for the material in an organized manner.

The development section, due to its size and structure, fulfills several goals of organization and aesthetic design. Modulation, implemented multiple times within this expansive structure, provides a much-needed contrast to the monochromatic expansion and elaboration of G minor presented in the exposition. New material in the development, introduced and organized without any ostensible intrusion of expositional themes, enhances this contrast. The means by which these ideas are organized illustrate an aesthetic compositional intent for the structure. Its massive size dissuades, if not prevents, the listener from compartmentalizing this section into separate moments of time. This development is a demonstration of the means by which Debussy distorts temporality. The effect is one of subtlety and relaxed movement while its structure suggests complexity and sophistication.

RECAPITULATION

To leave the development section Debussy implements dominant-tonic motion from D to G in the bass line between mm. 145-146. This is the first clear authentic cadence since m. 42 of the exposition. The mere distance between these two harmonic landmarks would suggest their significance. This is a resolution of tonal obscurity that tethered the exposition's closing zone through the development. The key of G minor is also reestablished after its long journey through the development's modulations. Returning to the tonality that homogenized the entire exposition emphasizes this moment's structural importance.

Even so, Debussy does little to announce the event. There is no immediate entrance of material that would help us recognize a return to familiar territory. In fact, neither the violin nor the piano features any significant change in activity across these measures, as if indifferent to the original key's return. Only a sustained double-stop is added to the violin's drone in m. 146, punctuating this significant arrival without obvious declamation.

To the classical sonata, the return to the original key is of the highest significance. The harmonic and thematic struggles expected in the development are resolved at this moment. In contrast, Debussy treats this arrival gracefully to the point of near nonchalance. Throughout the exposition and development, material has been displayed and painted in diverse colorations. Debussy has established a modal and harmonic free through the trend of varied modal reinterpretations. In this context, the return to G minor is simply another shift in color. Both harmony and material has moved freely across the

piece and have in no way been constrained by any tonal objective. The restatement of the original tonality was never sought out, and thus requires no celebration.

In this new section, Debussy reintroduces material from the exposition. By this standard it will be referred to as a recapitulation. It does not however, display any need to visit this material in an organized fashion. The classical recapitulation differs in its tendency to compliment the exposition's statements of thematic material in the original order and in the primary key. Debussy's material continues to be colored by the sonata's G minor tonality but proceeds to intermingle and move freely as it had in the exposition. This gives the entire sonata a new sort of continuity. The narrative objective of 'returning home' to the expositional themes is replaced by an uninterrupted dance of motives across a range of modal landscapes.

Beginning in m. 150, a statement of arpeggiated half-notes in the piano's right hand alludes to motive 'a' from the exposition. The violin replies, this time in direct quotation of mm. 5-7. An imitation of the first thematic zone continues through m. 180, comprising the unit labeled A' in Figure 1. This section mimics the interplay between motive 'a' and motive 'b' from the exposition. Motive 'a' is played primarily performed by the violin until interrupted by an allusion to the development. Motive 'b' continues to serve the role of concluding phrases by bringing us to a divergent cadence in m. 181.

This is quite similar to the primary thematic zone of the exposition. Both motives remain at the previous pitch level and are organized in the same manner. It is the piano's activity, however, that creates a distinction between the two sections. The rhythmic and harmonic gestures of the piano, taken directly from the development, establish the contrast between the exposition and recapitulatory presentations. In this way, Debussy

has maintained the roles of each instrument throughout the sonata. Melodic gestures from the violin often remain identical upon restatement. It is the piano that often recontextualizes these themes to create a variety of modal inflections. In comparing the expository and recapitulatory statements of the primary thematic zone, this relationship is seen on a larger scale. Motives 'a' and 'b' are played by the violin while the identity of this A' section is distinguished by the contrasting use of the piano and its presentation of development material.

Much like in the development, Debussy add interest by incorporating new material to fill the transitional section labeled Transition 2 in Figure 1. While mm. 186-195 are vaguely reminiscent to the gestures seen in mm. 18-21, there is an obvious disruption of the continuity between the exposition and recapitulation at this moment.

This fits well into the form because it rejects rather than confirms a chronological relationship between the two zones. The open dialogue amongst the sonata's ideas would only become burdened by linear restatement. Were thematic zones to proceed as they had in the exposition, the recapitulation would become limited in scope. New ideas could not be addressed, and the perception of material as freely juxtaposed objects would be lost. This starkly disagrees with Debussy's large-scale melding of the sonata into a single cohesive body. This unity of form is further expressed by a new thematic area combining motives 'a' and 'd2' labeled A" in Figure 1. Motives from the development continue to reappear openly in the last half of the sonata. Just as shapes are blurred by the mixing of overlapping colors, the intermingling of material merges the larger zones of the sonata together.

Some shapes are completely lost in the milieu. Motive ‘c,’ abundantly used in the expository zone, never returns in the latter half of the piece. Instead, another identifying attribute of the secondary thematic zone briefly returns in mm. 226-237 (labeled B’ in Figure 1). This section alternates primarily uses the pentatonic subset of F, D, C, G. The expository section included pentatonic sets G minor and A minor pentatonic, both of which contain the four notes given above. This recapitulatory statement adds A-flat and B-flat to the four-note set. Much like the modal inflections we have seen throughout the work, this provides variety to repeated material. In this particular case, it functions as an allusion to the second thematic zone that is never fully revisited.

During these measures the violin makes a clear statement of motive ‘b.’ As if answering the exposition’s stratification of the motive, the violin plays the minor third interval at the instrument’s lowest possible pitch level. In every case we have seen thus far, motive ‘b’ has consistently been utilized as a means of punctuating the ends of phrases. Presented here in m. 226 out of complete silence, Debussy cleverly implements the motive to anticipate the conclusion of the piece.

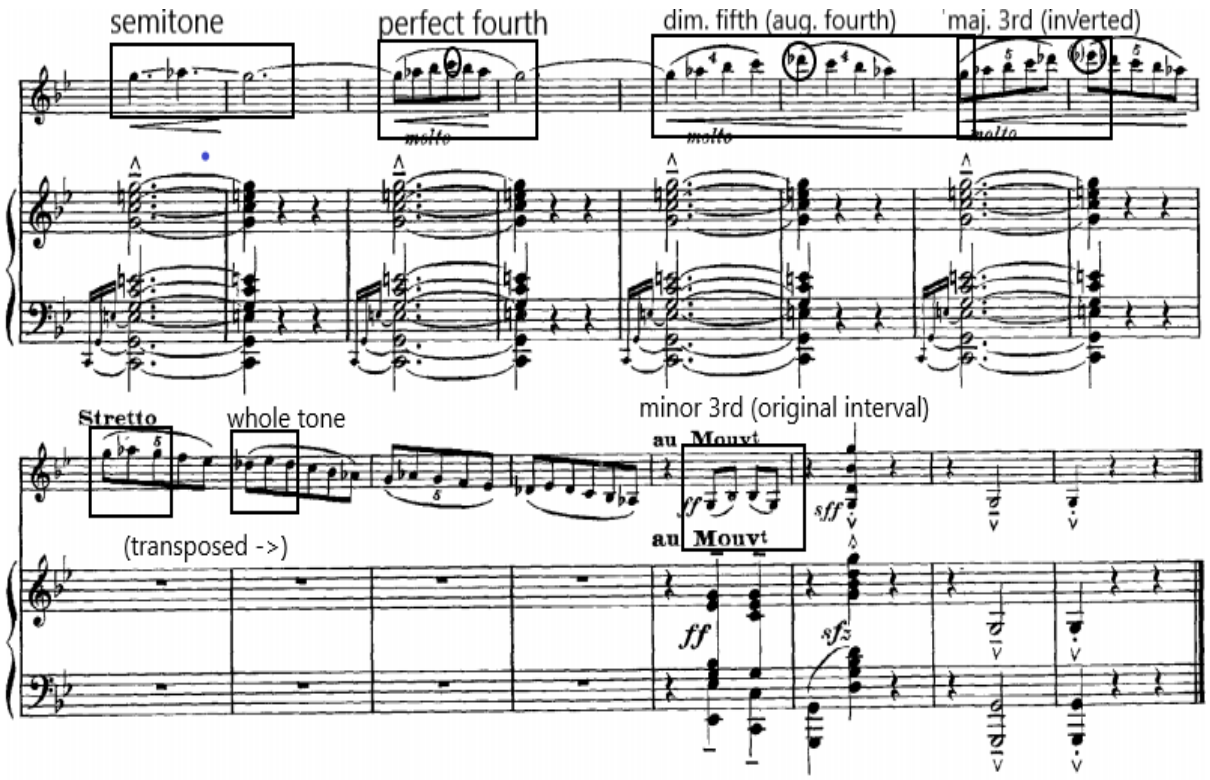
Since this ‘recapitulatory’ zone does not follow classical principles and does not share a chronological model with the exposition, it lacks a predictable means of concluding the form. This isolated statement of motive ‘b’ m. 226 now serves the purpose of large-scale closure.

The final passage of the movement demonstrates Debussy’s ability decorate and transform a motive in measures following m. 238. He uses the shape of motive ‘b’ – a small rising interval that returns to the original note – and elaborates it in various ways from mm. 238-252 (Shown in Figure 14). While always returning to the note G natural,

the violin performs figures that transform the rising interval of a minor third into every chromatic interval between the unison and the tritone. In the process, Debussy draws attention to an interesting relationship between motive ‘b’ and motive ‘d2’ by using the latter to create the semitone version of the motive ‘b’ shape.

This last passage enforces a variety of large-scale continuities. Motive ‘b’ fulfills its ultimate role of closure through elaboration at the end of the form. Our primary key of G minor is asserted at the very end by the final chords and the passage’s insistence on repeating the note G. The C major harmony across mm. 238-247 is used to echo the first two chords of the movement, providing yet another sense of unity.

FIGURE 14



CONCLUSION

Elegant design in Debussy's Sonata for Violin and Piano is attained through a negotiation of classical structures and French aesthetic desire. Every expression of formal unity described in this paper is in some way analogous to a classical sonata structure. In each instance these structures are dismantled and reorganized by modal or harmonic variations, allowing Debussy to obscure their shape and repurpose his material. The resulting ambiguity makes the scattered presentation and rearrangement of recurring motives and ideas a possibility. In this sonata, the composer explores many of these possibilities to develop a unique, independent form. While exhibiting his understanding and control of classical principles, this piece does more to demonstrate his autonomy from the traditions than his reliance on them. As this paper has discussed, structures such as the recapitulation and thematic zones in Debussy's work serve completely different purposes than those of its past. The reappearances of material and gestures are placed freely, no longer used to punctuate the linear goals of the classical form, are artfully juxtaposed and colored by Debussy's form. As a result, the musical objects of the sonata blend into a single image, unburdened by direction or temporality.

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